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CALIFORNIA

Why the Black Keys shut out hundreds of fans, causing chaos at the Wiltern



Patrick Carney, left, and Dan Auerbach of the Black Keys perform during a concert at the Wiltern on Thursday in Los Angeles. (Scott Dudelson / Getty Images)

By Alejandra Reyes-Velarde

Sept. 20, 2019 8:45 PM PT

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Beatriz Zaragoza and her two children couldn’t wait to see Thursday’s concert at the Wiltern featuring the Black Keys, one of their favorite bands that had been on a years-long hiatus.

They bought tickets through StubHub for more than \$700. They fought rush-hour traffic to drive to the venue from Boyle Heights. They paid Koreatown prices for parking and arrived at the Wiltern two hours early, at 5 p.m.

After more than two hours in line, the family made it through security and entered the Wiltern’s foyer, buzzing with pre-concert excitement. Her kids — ages 9 and 14 — were finally going to see the band whose songs they imitate at home on their guitar and drum set.

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DAY 8	DAY 9	DAY 10	DAY 11	DAY 12	DAY 13	DAY 14
DAY 15	DAY 16	DAY 17	DAY 18	DAY 19	DAY 20	DAY 21
DAY 22	DAY 23	DAY 24	DAY 25	DAY 26	DAY 27	DAY 28

30-DAY PLAN

DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	DAY 6	DAY 7
DAY 8	DAY 9	DAY 10	DAY 11	DAY 12	DAY 13	DAY 14
DAY 15	DAY 16	DAY 17	DAY 18	DAY 19	DAY 20	DAY 21
DAY 22	DAY 23	DAY 24	DAY 25	DAY 26	DAY 27	DAY 28
DAY 29	DAY 30	DAY 31	DAY 32	DAY 33	DAY 34	DAY 35

But one look at Zaragoza’s mobile tickets and a Wiltern employee turned her away. He didn’t even scan them.

Zaragoza was told the Black Keys were not accepting tickets from third-party vendors.

“Why did the band do this?” her youngest son asked, crying as the family walked dejectedly back to their car, minutes before the concert began.

Hundreds of fans who purchased tickets from usually reliable third-party vendors, such as StubHub, SeatGeek and Vivid Seats, had the same experience.

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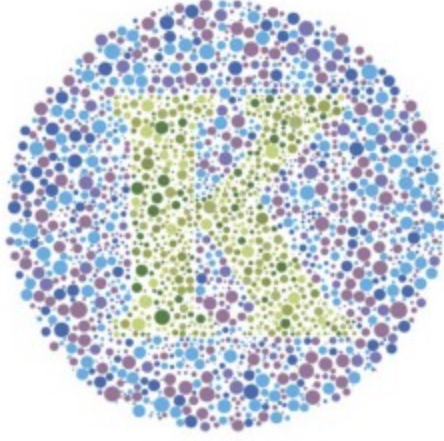
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"I was on hold for over an hour with that ironic, sad piano music," said Evan Smith, 57, who spent more than \$350 on tickets. People around him were arguing with companies from which they purchased their tickets — in his case, Vivid Seats.

— Sherry Sabety (@SSabety) September 20, 2019

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The Wiltern show was a kickoff gig celebrating the Black Keys' upcoming tour in support of their ninth studio album, "Let's Rock."

Third-party sellers were scrambling Friday to investigate how the ticket problems happened and return customers’ money — and they wanted to clear the air, saying the fault was not theirs. Several employees of the resale vendors said neither the Black Keys, Ticketmaster nor Live Nation indicated that tickets to the concert would be nontransferable.

Some thought Ticketmaster was still trying to monopolize the ticket game, just days after the Department of Justice announced an investigation into such practices. Variety reported Wednesday that [the government is examining whether Ticketmaster has violated a consent decree](#) stating it can’t prevent events from booking venues that use ticketing services other than Ticketmaster and from retaliating when venues go with a competitor.

Live Nation and Ticketmaster said that they always have complied with the consent decree and do not force anyone into ticketing agreements by leveraging content, or retaliate against venues that use other ticketing providers.

“Ticketmaster has been successfully growing its client base over the past decade as a result of continuous innovation and providing the best ticketing solution in the industry,” the company said in a statement. “During that period, Live Nation and Ticketmaster have always complied with their obligations under the consent decree....Nevertheless, for years now some competitors have found it useful to confuse the issue with misinformation and baseless allegations of consent decree violations.”

Ticketmaster and the Black Keys said their tickets used a rotating barcode that updates regularly and would have become invalid the second they were moved from the Ticketmaster app. The technology Ticketmaster and Live Nation developed worked effectively to prevent fraud, a company representative said.

The company said it would communicate the no-transfer rule more prominently in the future.

“I’ve never seen something like this happen,” said an employee of one of the resale marketplaces, who asked to remain anonymous for fear of retribution. “It’s unfair for these third-party players because everyone had a valid ticket.”

One seller said Ticketmaster never told anyone about the change in ticket rules. The seller, a Los Angeles-based independent ticket broker who wished to remain anonymous for fear of retaliation by Ticketmaster, said StubHub typically fines sellers who try to sell fake or invalid tickets. In an email sent to the broker by StubHub, the company said it would not do that in this case because the tickets were made nontransferable.

SeatGeek, one of the third-party sellers, said the situation seemed to target those who bought tickets on non-Ticketmaster platforms and “ultimately punished the fans who just wanted to see the show.”

@SeatGeek Got rejected at the door for the Black Keys at the Wiltern tonight with tickets we bought off Seatgeek's site. Thanks a lot for the disappointment. :sob::sob:

— Karen Kim (@wonnissi) September 20, 2019

I went to see The Black Keys last night & this is the only picture I got, I suck
pic.twitter.com/jVxDLYcwDD

— ratchet saturn khaleesi (@eye_linermami) September 20, 2019

Fans said they got no notice that their tickets were no good, even as they waited in line. Customers interviewed by The Times said their tickets had Ticketmaster’s logo and a QR code on them and were either emailed from the resale vendors or downloaded through an app. the band and Ticketmaster said everyone who purchased a ticket through Ticketmaster or the band’s fan page got in. The concert was well-attended, with 97% of the 1,850-seat venue full.

“Unfortunately, scalpers took this opportunity to defraud our fans and steal their money by selling tickets that were ineligible for transfer on scalper sites,” the band said in a statement.

The Wiltern show was a kickoff gig celebrating the Black Keys’ upcoming tour in support of their ninth studio album, “Let’s Rock.”

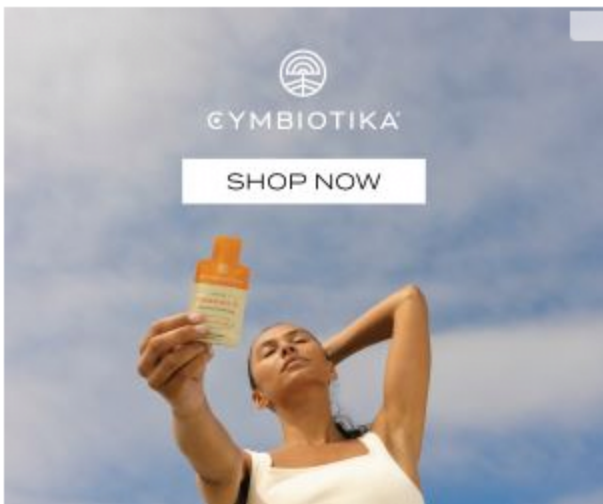
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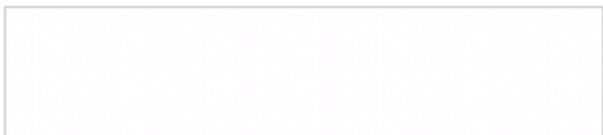
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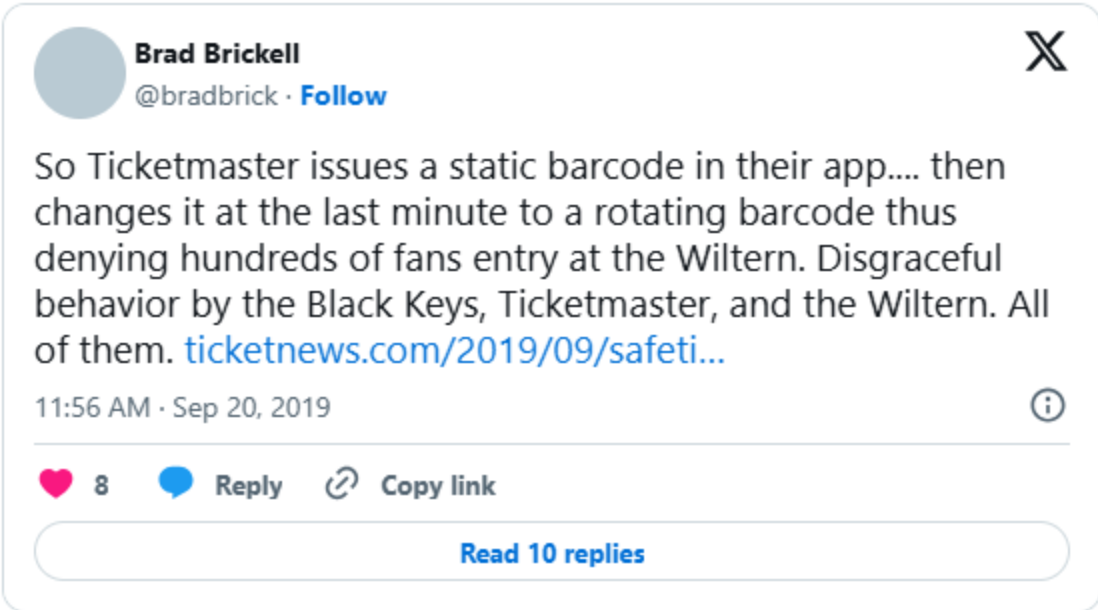
Zaragoza has had experiences with bad tickets before, but she said this was different. The scale of the snafu and the lack of notification to fans were outrageous, she said.

“I understand that this happens,” she said. “I’m not happy that they didn’t tell people beforehand. I’m really upset. Just horrible, a horrible experience.”

Smith was also miffed, but he didn’t blame the Black Keys. He was furious with the third-party vendors, noting that the tickets shouldn’t have been sold in the first place if they were nontransferable and that the businesses should have researched the tickets’ provenance and any rules that went with them.

Now, Smith is considering filing a police report or legal complaint against his ticket seller.

“You start thinking, who is behind the curtain?” he said. “I don’t know, something stinks.”




If you purchased tickets from StubHub, SeatGeek or Vivid Seats, the outlets are offering refunds.

Times staff writer Randall Roberts contributed to this report.

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
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Alejandra Reyes-Velarde is a Metro reporter for the Los Angeles Times. Previously she wrote for the San Francisco Business Times and the Sacramento Bee. A UCLA graduate, she is originally from Duarte, Calif., and is a native Spanish speaker.

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